

## A MESSAGE FROM . . .



**BOB RILEY**  
Governor, State of Alabama

**A**labama is blessed with natural resources. From our pristine forests, to fertile farmland, abundant wildlife, and cool clear rivers and streams, very few states have the natural beauty of Alabama. But our natural resources are not our only asset. One of the most important assets is a group of people that provide a service of protecting our families and our homes - the Volunteer Fire Departments.

There are 992 rural volunteer fire departments in Alabama, providing fire protection to approximately 80 percent of the state's land base. These departments are made up of thousands of men and women who have unselfishly devoted themselves to their community by helping provide one of the most vital needs – fire protection. These people spend hundreds of hours serving and training in the department, as well as their financial resources. As one of the original members of the Ashland Volunteer Fire Department in Clay County, I have a first hand knowledge of the dedication and commitment it takes to be a volunteer firefighter.

In the 2002 fiscal year, our state's volunteer firefighters assisted the Alabama Forestry Commission in saving 1,255 homes and 417 other structures. Aside from fire protection and suppression they prevent fires by educating the public on fire safety. For decades the Alabama Forestry Commission has been one of the major supporters of the rural fire system not only by helping form new departments but also by providing equipment, technical assistance, and financial resources.

In many neighborhoods, the volunteer fire department serves as the heartbeat of the community. I would like to commend each individual and each department for the outstanding job done by Alabama's rural volunteer departments and encourage each citizen to join together in supporting these local heroes. ♣



**TIMOTHY C. BOYCE**  
State Forester

**W**hen you drive around the state and look at the vastness and abundance of “our” forest, do you ever wonder who owns it? Does forest industry own it? If not, then maybe the government does? Actually, 78 percent of Alabama's forestland is owned by private non-industrial landowners – people like you and your neighbor. This same land helps to make Alabama's forest the second largest commercial forest in the nation, and supports our state's largest manufacturing industry, the forest products industry.

Although privately owned, this natural resource is important to all of the people of Alabama. It provides wood products, jobs, recreational opportunities, clean air and water, and abundant wildlife. Because private landowners play such an important role in maintaining and enhancing our state's forestland, it is extremely important that they are supported in carrying out proper land management while at the same time meeting their objectives.

The Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) is a new program that will assist private non-industrial landowners by providing financial, technical, and educational assistance. This program was established to help state foresters further support and encourage the long-term sustainability of non-industrial private forestlands.

The federal objectives of this program are to invest in practices to establish, restore, protect, manage, maintain and enhance the health and productivity of the non-industrial forestlands in the United States for timber, plant habitat, soil, water, air quality, wetlands and riparian buffers.

The Alabama State Stewardship Advisory Committee has set three priority areas for the funds to be spent: technical assistance, landowner education, and cost-share assistance.

In Alabama, the program will be administered by the Alabama Forestry Commission.

This program is an important step in helping our state's non-industrial private landowners manage their land so that it will not only meet the needs of this generation of Alabamians but for generations in the future. ♣